

AROUND THE REGION . . .



LOXAHATCHEE RIVER RESTORATION EFFORTS REACH MILESTONE

Council agrees on amount of fresh water needed for a healthy river

It took a few years and more than a few difficult meetings. But the agencies and local committees involved with restoration of the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River shook hands in agreement this summer on the flow of fresh water needed for the river's environmental health.

It's no small step. Progress in restoring this 9-mile, federally designated "wild and scenic river" in Martin and Palm Beach counties required consensus among the many groups involved, plus support from the public. It culminated when the Loxahatchee River Management Coordinating Council stamped their approval on the South Florida Water Management District's restoration recommendations for the river. Technical presentations, lengthy discussions and informative public workshops all contributed to the successful outcome.

So, too, did the dedication of the individuals who helped make it happen. "Staffers from the Florida Park Service and the Loxahatchee River District were invaluable partners in this collaborative effort," said Terrie Bates, assistant deputy executive director of water resources at the South Florida Water Management District. "We would not have achieved this without them."

District staff members, some based at the Martin/St. Lucie Service Center, were recognized as the agency's Team of the Month for their role. A citation honored the team of 10 for making "a positive difference in the long-term protection of the Loxahatchee River ecosystem."

What exactly was achieved?

"Basically, we put a number on the amount of water the river needs to be healthy," explained Boyd Gunsalus, senior environmental scientist at the Martin/St. Lucie Service Center. "It's a range, actually; one for the wet season and one for the dry season. The specific numbers, described in a document known as the Preferred Restoration Flow Scenario, will help water managers create a more natural volume and timing of water flowing down the river."

Decades ago, flood control canals and local development drained away much of the water from the Loxahatchee's Northwest Fork and its narrow floodplain. Restoring the water is clearly needed, but for many years no one could agree on how much and when it should flow.

Now they do. The information will be used by water managers in the near future to plan operational changes at upstream flood control structures. These changes will provide restorative flows when supplemental water is available. More significant are the projects in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, some of which are built and others that are under design or are proposed. Each of the projects in the local watershed will now incorporate the approved Preferred Restoration Flow Scenario, helping to assure that restoration flows to this wild and scenic river are fully achieved.



Cypress trees — some hundreds of years old — still stand in the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (top).

Flow of sufficient fresh water is crucial to the river's environmental health, which has been declining since flood control efforts and development impacted the area. Scientists like Boyd Gunsalus (left) plus water managers and local officials have successfully crafted an agreement that identifies the best wet-season and dry-season flows. This was an essential step for river restoration projects to move forward.

EAST MEETS THE EVERGLADES

District celebrates Asian Pacific Heritage Month

The South Florida Water Management District proudly celebrated Asian Pacific American Heritage Month in May by participating in a number of events including a ceremony at the White House honoring the achievements and contributions of Asian Pacific Americans. Miami-Dade Regional Service Center Director Jose Keichi Fuentes attended the event by invitation of President Bush. The Miami-Dade Regional Service Center also hosted Japanese Ambassador Ryoza Kato and his consulate on a bird-watching excursion through Everglades National Park. The group also participated in a cultural exchange program with the City of Miami, taking kids from Kagoshima, a sister city, to Parrot Jungle Island and Everglades National Park to introduce them to and learn about our fragile ecosystems. The District also participated in the 2005 Aichi World's Fair in Japan. More than 15 million people, as well as political leaders from over 120 nations visited the District's display on Everglades restoration and joined in the celebration of this year's theme, "Nature's Wisdom."

Other recent happenings coordinated by the Miami-Dade Regional Service Center include:

- Governing Board Member Irela Bagué as well as District staffers Jose Fuentes and Audrey Ordenes accompanied Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez on a helicopter tour over the Everglades to highlight the importance of Everglades restoration. State Rep. Julio Robaina also participated in a similar tour.

- The agency participated in the adopt-a-tree and low-flow showerhead exchange fair in August at Tamiami Fairgrounds. As part of a water conservation partnership effort with Miami-Dade Water and Sewer, families could trade in their existing showerheads in exchange for low-flow showerheads to help save water.

- The District attended the first annual PJ's in the Park event at Kennedy Park in Coconut Grove, along with Freddy the Friendly Alligator. The event was for parents and their children to participate in a number of educational events including an environmental awareness component of water conservation.

- The District also participated in the Guayabera Festival held at Jose Marti Park along the banks of the Miami River. The Guayabera is a traditional shirt that is a symbol of distinction and elegance that is recognized and used by the Caribbean and Latin American cultures. The festival was held in a partnership effort between the City of Miami and Channel 41 to increase participation and cultural awareness of the Miami River dredging projects and the river's future growth.



Above: Japanese Ambassador Kato (fourth from left) is joined by his consulate and District staffers on a bird-watching hike in Everglades National Park in May.

Left: Joseph Jean-Baptist gives up trees for 'adoption' at an outreach event in Miami.